

John McCain Statement
5/20/99 Internet Filtering Hearing

The Internet is, perhaps, the most revolutionary tool in terms of its impact on society and culture, since the printing press. No other media holds the possibility of bringing so much information, potential for knowledge, and entertainment, to so many people. However, with this tremendous potential comes tremendous challenges and many potential dangers. Our children are particularly vulnerable to these dangers.

The debate, to this point, surrounding the risks the Internet poses to our children has been dominated by concerns regarding children's access to pornography. As previous hearings before this Committee has demonstrated, this risk is very real, and very urgent. However, as recent events in Colorado have so tragically demonstrated, there are many other Internet content issues that parents and society should be aware of and concerned about.

The rapid growth of the Internet has provided unprecedented opportunity for those who would promote division and hatred to reach a larger and broader audience. Through a multimedia mix of text messages, video, music, and interactive games, hate groups are able to spread their toxic message. Neo-Nazi propaganda, images of burning crosses, racist literature, religious bigotry, messages and images of unimaginable hatred and cruelty are just one click away from our children's eyes and mind.

Equally, instruction manuals on bomb making, and drug making and purchasing are available over the Internet. Simple word searches using "marijuana" turn up web sites providing instruction on how to cultivate, buy, and consume drugs. Type in "pipe bomb" and a myriad of sites on how to make, and how to achieve the maximum carnage with a bomb are immediately accessible.

Our children are particularly vulnerable to this reality. They are literally growing up in this digital age. The Internet is an increasingly integral part of their lives. Some 30 percent of U.S. households are wired to the Internet. With the implementation of the E-rate, every child in America will be wired through their local school or library.

The first line of defense is parents. Parents must be involved in their children's lives. They must make it a point to know what their kids are doing on-line, the games they are playing, the web sites and chat rooms they are visiting, whom they are talking to.

But parents need help. Currently, for most children, their Internet activities will occur outside the home. With taxpayer dollars being used to wire schools and libraries to the Internet, these institutions become partners in pursuing the compelling interest of protecting our children. To this end, I, along with Senator Hollings, have introduced the Children's Internet Protection Act, requiring schools and libraries, utilizing the E-rate, to deploy blocking and filtering software on computers used by kids. This would provide a baseline of protection for our children, while providing complete local discretion for determining what and when children view certain material

that may be deemed inappropriate.

Today, this hearing will focus on some of the most potentially dangerous material on the Internet. Bomb making material and drug-related material pose an immediate threat, not just to the child who views them, but to those who may become victims to their destructive potential. However, messages of hate and division pose a much more subtle and sinister threat to our children, and our broader society. For these toxic messages pollute and corrupt the very humanity of our children, teaching them to hate.

As recent events in Kosovo, the Sudan, and other parts of the world have so cruelly demonstrated, the darker side of human nature, our capacity to hate, to persecute and to kill based upon racial and religious bigotry is not a thing of the past.

It is my hope that this hearing will raise the awareness of parents to the perils of the Internet, that it will encourage a dialogue between parents and their kids on these issues, and that it will increase public awareness of the types of harmful materials available on the Internet, and the need to control the access by young and innocent minds to this destructive content.